



Middlesex Coalition For Children

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Testimony on H.B. 6353, An Act Concerning State Budget Reform Appropriations Committee Public Hearing March 22, 2013

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The Middlesex Coalition for Children **opposes changes** in H.B. 6353 which will have the effect of reducing the autonomy of the Office of the Child Advocate and hiding its appropriation from public view.

We would like to call your attention to one advantage, in particular, of the current autonomy and public visibility of the Office of the Child Advocate. When there is a very serious incidence of abuse or child death, whole communities are affected. Sandy Hook is an extreme instance, but even a single child death can shatter the tranquility of a community, and leave it questioning its institutions. Middletown had a case last year involving a household with several preschool and school-age children. A newborn came close to death, and the other children were found to be at extreme risk. How these children had escaped the attention and succor not only of DCF but of schools, pediatricians and early intervention programs was – and is – a major community issue. It is of vital importance to the entire community to understand exactly what went wrong, and to work toward a more comprehensive system of child protection.

In cases like these, the important thing is to have an agency that

- a) Is **independent** of agencies involved in the case
- b) Makes **public** the results of independent investigations

Without independent investigations and public report, every incident leaves behind in the community a kind of poison. The responsible agencies may indeed improve their practices, but if done behind closed doors there is a residue of suspicion and mistrust.

One critical aspect of the Office of the Child Advocate's function and mission is to ensure public trust. It has been doing an excellent job. **Nothing should be done to compromise its independence or bury it under layers of bureaucracy.**

We appreciate this opportunity to testify.